

Council discusses new sports rules

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The NCAA now holds coaches responsible for their players' academic performance, going so far as to withhold athletic funding if a high percentage of the team is ineligible to play or does not graduate.

Athletic department representatives from the University of Kentucky, Western Kentucky University and the University of Louisville Monday visited the Council on Postsecondary Education. They discussed the new NCAA academic requirements, the consequences for not meeting the standards and how they ensure their athletes perform well on the field and in the classroom.

As part of a new academic reform, the NCAA created "academic progress rate" last year to monitor sports teams' graduation rates and academic performance. Each team receives an academic progress rate, which tracks if students meet academic eligibility requirements and if they graduate from the university.

Retention is measured by whether a student athlete who began with the school as a freshman graduates within six years, said Sandy Bell, University of Kentucky compliance officer. However, if a student leaves to attend and play for another university, that negatively affects the team and school's progress rate.

If a student from another university transfers in as a sophomore or

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junior and graduates from the university, the university cannot claim it under the academic progress rate formula, Bell said.

However, a new program the NCAA will begin this fall, graduation success rate, will allow universities to claim incoming transfers who graduate, Bell said. It also does not penalize universities if some transfers out, but was in good academic standing.

If a student leaves to pursue a professional athletic career, it negatively affects the team's academic progress rate, Bell said. This can particularly impact smaller teams such as basketball where one or two people make a big difference.

All teams must maintain a 925 academic progress rate or higher or receive a contemporaneous pen-

alty, Bell said. Contemporaneous penalties bar teams from receiving financial aid for one new player for a year.

Schools received their 2003-2004 academic progress rate, but will not be punished for low scores, according to the NCAA Web site. Penalties begin in the 2005-2006 school year.

Fewer athletic scholarships can be difficult for universities that do not have overwhelming amounts of financial aid, said Mitch Barnhart, University of Kentucky athletic director.

He said UK has more than 500 athletes and 230 of them share scholarships. Only 140 to 150 have full rides. The other 80 share book and partial tuition scholarships.

"A lot of (our athletes) are com-

peting for the love of the game or to further their experience," Barnhart said.

To keep athletes on the right track, UK has the 40, 60, 80 program, which encourages students to choose a major their freshman year and have completed 40 percent as they enter their sophomore year, have 60 percent complete by their junior year and 80 percent as they enter their senior year, Barnhart said.

This forces students to select a major early on and makes it difficult to change majors, Barnhart said. Though the students are on track to graduate, they may be in a program they do not particularly like.

The university also provides fifth-year aid. After students exhaust their eligibility, the athletic department helps them finish their academic careers and graduate, Barnhart said.

Western Kentucky University is ranked first in the Sunbelt Conference in academic progress rate, said Wood Selig, athletic director. Nine of 10 men's teams exceeded the 925 rate this year and the school has an 81 percent graduation rate.

To maintain high academics, the university is "beefing up" full-time academic counselors and providing tutors as needed, Selig said.

"We want them to stay on track and not get behind on their course work," Selig said.

The university also requires students to be enrolled in at least 15 hours a semester and stresses summer school options, Selig said. That way, students have more room to change their major and not fall behind.

Plus, coaches calculate the academic progress rate with athletic department staff so they know where their teams stand and they are held accountable for the rate, Selig said.

"Coaches do a good job of identifying those who perform academically as they do those who

perform well athletically," Selig said. Those who are struggling are referred to tutoring.

University of Louisville Associate Athletic Director Julie Hermann created L Care, a total support program for student athletes, said Marvin Mitchell, associate athletic director for academic services.

"If they are taken care of in other areas, they will perform better on the field and perform better in other areas," Mitchell said.

The university partners with Jewish Hospital to provide total sports medicine from injuries and physical therapy to counseling for substance abuse, eating disorders and anxiety and treatment for any other medical problem, Hermann said.

This allows coaches to focus on coaching and leaves other problems to experts in those fields, Hermann said.

"We provide swift, subtle, significant care and intervene before it becomes a public issue or (the athletes) get off track," Hermann said. "Our focus is to get them graduates and get them placed (in the job market)."

Hermann said the university also uses a version of L Care for its freshmen.

"We want to work for all students, it's what we are all about," Hermann said.

"We want (student athletes) to become fully prepared people to go out into the world," said Shirley Willihnganz, University of Louisville provost. "This is a program for sports and beyond that."

In other business, the council:

- Heard the results of an interim affordability study, which said Kentucky is affordable, but needs to work harder to make higher education affordable for independent students.

Independent students are typically nontraditional students who are at least 24 years old and do not live with or are dependent on their parents.

The report also said Kentucky

has many financial aid opportunities, which are "equitably distributed," meaning lower income students received more federal financial aid. However, higher-income students received more institutional aid, which is merit-based rather than need-based.

The final report is due in September.

- Approved its strategic plan, which will guide policy decisions for the next five years.

The strategic plan includes the public agenda, which is a docu-

ment asking five key questions such as "Do more Kentuckians have certificates and degrees?" or "Are college graduates prepared for life and work in Kentucky?" The council wants to affirmatively answer the questions by 2020 and has goals throughout the public agenda to get the council to a "yes" answer.

Other strategic plan components are statewide key indicators and campus action plans, which set out goals for all public institutions for the next five years.